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SUBJ: RESPECTED OPPOSITION FIGURE DIES

**¶1.** (U) Opposition MP and former Second Vice President Chakufwa Chihana died on the morning of June 12. Chihana, leader of the once mighty but now tiny Alliance For Democracy (AFORD) party, died in South Africa after surgery to remove a tumor from his brain. The former labor union leader had been one of the main proponents of multi-party democracy for Malawi.

**¶2.** (U) Many assumed that Chihana would become President of Malawi in 1994, after he had led the fight for multi-party elections from abroad. However, he was arrested upon his return to Malawi in 1993. Released from prison only a week before the 1994 elections, he came in third. His party, AFORD, captured northern Malawi's parliamentary seats and became a junior partner in the coalition government of the day.

**¶3.** (U) While AFORD initially had a firm grip on the north, including Chihana's home district, it slowly began to lose both MPs and rank-and-file supporters. As is normal in Malawian politics, Chihana and AFORD often switched their political allegiances in their efforts to maintain the party's influence. Each move drained away more AFORD support, and the party eventually lost almost all political relevance in general. Today AFORD has only two seats in Parliament, and President Bingu Mutharika's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has filled the vacuum AFORD left in the north.

**¶4.** (U) Comment: Despite his party's slow downward spiral, Chihana is still hailed as the freedom fighter and fiery union-man he was. Government has announced a formal mourning period and that he will receive a full state funeral on June 17. Malawians, and especially those from the north, regard Chihana as a hero and advocate of the average Malawian. End Comment.

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